

A life book shall be started for each child within 30 days of placement in out-of-home care. The book shall accompany the child through the permanency process.

A life book is significant in helping the child form a link to his/her past. Through the collection of historical data, memorabilia, stories, and special events, the life book provides a picture of the child's life. The life book may help decrease the trauma of loss and separation a child experiences when placed in out-of-home care. Further, the life book:

1. Serves as a preventive health measure;
2. Gives the child access to history while giving answers and straightening out misconceptions;
3. Provides continuity, helping children develop an intact sense of identity;
4. Helps a child avoid fantasy and denial;
5. Retrieves memories; and
6. Helps the Children's Service Worker identify unfinished business of the child.

The life book may take various forms including a folder, packet, picture album, or a specially prepared box, which creates a permanent record for the child, the birth family, the foster family, or the adoptive family.

Ultimately, the child must determine what goes into his/her life book. However, the placement provider, the Children's Service Worker, and others who have contact with the child need to collect information to provide the child as he/she matures and asks more probing questions and needs more in-depth information. Further, the placement provider can supplement the child's own knowledge, provide accurate, factual information, and correct misperceptions and faulty memories.

The birth parents must be involved in developing the life book as much as possible and with the child's permission. Ideally, the birth parents will work together with the placement provider and the child on the life book. They can provide significant information about the child's life prior to placement. Further, cards, letters, and other forms of communication, from the birth parents may be included in the life book.

Material to Include in the Life Book

The life book should include all information available to the child. Material which may be included:

Birth Information:

- Height, weight, length;
- Day, time and date of birth;
- Weather;
- Place of birth (including picture of hospital);
- Birth certificate and birth name;
- Baby pictures, footprints, baby hair;
- Special gifts/letters;
- Hospital bracelet;
- Name of the delivery physician;
- Hospital records;
- Any unusual birth circumstances including:
 - Pregnancy history of mother;
 - Any substance abuse during pregnancy or history of drug use.

Information about Birth Family

Description of birth parents:

- Picture;
- Nationality;
- Physical description, i.e., height, weight, eye and hair color, etc.;
- Medical history, especially hereditary conditions;
- Special talents of birth parents;
- Living or deceased;

- Education/occupation/profession;
- Date of birth;
- Place of birth; and
- Extended family, including names, ages, addresses, physical description, medical history, etc.

Information about siblings:

- Names, ages (dates of birth);
- Pictures;
- Physical description, i.e., height, weight, eye and hair color, etc.;
- Out-of-home placements, i.e., with whom, how long, current address; and
- Significant events.

Pictures of:

- Parents, siblings, other kinships;
- Placement providers including all family members, pets, the home, child's room, etc.;
- Child over time including school pictures;
- Other significant people including teachers, coaches, etc.;
- Birth family home;
- Picture of day care facility, schools, church, etc. attended by child;
- Activities in which the child participated, i.e., camp, Scouts, sporting events;
- School activities, such as plays, prom, etc.; and
- Other pictures of persons or events significant to the child.

Religious information:

- Places of worship child attended;
- Name of minister, Sunday school teachers, etc.;
- Baptism, confirmation and other similar records; and
- Papers and other materials from Sunday school.

Genogram/Ecomap/Timeline:

- Provides information about family members;
- Includes significant dates in each family member's life (i.e., birth, marriage, divorces, serious illness/hospitalizations, death, etc.); and
- May include significant information such as nationality, occupation, disabilities, cause of death, etc.

Information about ALL Placements (Foster, Kinship, Residential, etc.)

Reason for placement: This will provide the child an understanding of the need for placement.

- Dates and addresses of placements.

Identify the decision makers: Clarifies that decisions are made by adults.

- Judge;
- Juvenile officers;
- Children's Service Workers; and
- Birth, foster and adoptive parents;

Regional information:

- Country, city, state;
- Climate, season;

- Terrain; and
- Customs.

Anecdotal information, family stories.

Family traditions - Special events:

- Holidays, smells, senses; and
- Vacations.

Meaningful items and possessions, security items.

Life and Growth Information

Developmental Milestones (all firsts, such as first word spoken, first steps, etc.):

- Physical;
- Language;
- Social; and
- Temperamental characteristics.

School information:

- School systems attended;
- Favorite subjects;
- Favorite teachers;
- Report cards; and
- Drawings completed by the child.

Activities/Interests:

- Likes/dislikes;
- Hobbies;

- Strengths and Weaknesses;
- Organizations (i.e., Scouts, church groups, sports teams);
- Awards, recognition, newspaper clippings; and
- Friends.

Health and Medical Information

Medical Information:

- List of clinics, hospitals, etc., where the child received care, surgery, etc.;
- Immunization record;
- Diseases;
- Allergies;
- Medical history of birth family, particularly hereditary conditions; and
- Record of child's illnesses which may identify a significant pattern.

Process of dealing with loss, separation, attachment, and past abuse/neglect:

- Therapist's name;
- Frequency and duration of therapy;
- Therapy goals;
- Contacts; and
- Correspondence.

Creating the life book is an ongoing process that produces a living record of the child's growth and development.

The process may be painful at times for the child, therefore, the Children's Service Worker or caretaker must be acutely aware and sensitive to the child's feelings. The

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child should be allowed time to connect with the past and assimilate information and feelings before moving forward.

Creating a life book may help the child resolve the past, satisfy his/her need to know, and fill in the missing pieces.

Sources:

Three Rivers Adoption Council, Creating and Using Lifebooks: A Guide for Adoptive Parents, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: 1990.

Adoption of Children with Special Needs: A Curriculum for the Training of Adoption Workers, Pasztor, 1982.

Lifebooks: Tool for Working with Children in Placement, Backhaus, 1984.

MEMORANDA HISTORY: